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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000799

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: GOT CONGRATULATES NEW ARMENIAN
ADMINISTRATION, SEEKS DIALOGUE ON NORMALIZED RELATIONS

REF: ANKARA 339

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 b, d

¶1. (U) PM Erdogan congratulated newly-appointed Armenian PM Tigran Sarkissian on his assignment in an April 22 letter in which he called on the two "neighborly countries" to take concrete steps to find lasting solutions to their existing problems through dialogue and establishing good neighborly relations (see full text para. 4). He said Turkey's earlier offer (on establishing an historical commission) was still on the table and would facilitate the process of making progress on normalized relations. Erdogan's letter came on the heels of a similar, April 21 letter from FM Babacan to his new counterpart, Armenian FM Nalbandian, in which he congratulated the new FM and said Turkey stands ready to work towards the normalization of relations (see full text para. 5). On February 21, President Gul wrote to then-Armenian President-elect Sargsian congratulating him on his election victory and expressing his wish that their joint efforts would contribute to stability, confidence and cooperation in the region (reftel). Gul was one of the first and only world leaders to congratulate Sargsian on his election, doing so immediately after the Armenian vote and before election-related violence in Yerevan ensued.

¶2. (C) Turkish media reported PM Sarkissian's favorable response to Erdogan's letter, in which Sarkissian reportedly said direct bilateral talks would help resolve problems on both sides and that the GOAM is ready to start a dialogue and establish "normal relations without preconditions." FM Nalbandian has made similar remarks. Turkish MFA South Caucasus Section Head Yavuz Kul reconfirmed to us April 28 that Turkey is ready to engage Armenia directly in bilateral talks -- a necessary first step toward normalizing relations. The GOT recognizes, he said, that it will take the GOAM some time to recover from the elections crisis, but that it is now up to Armenia, when ready, to accept the Turkish opening and for the two sides to meet.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: These coordinated congratulatory messages underscore GOT seriousness about moving toward normalized relations with Armenia. Some have argued the GOT is pursuing a more forward-leaning foreign policy with respect to Cyprus and Armenia to strengthen U.S. and EU support for the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), which faces a closure case. President Gul's letter to then President-elect Sargsian pre-dated the filing of the AKP closure case, though, and Turkish solicitations toward Armenia are fraught with political risk for the embattled government. Remarks by GOAM officials during Armenian Remembrance Day (April 24) commemorations in Yerevan, in which the GOAM pledged to

redouble efforts to pursue genocide recognition, received widespread media coverage here, as did an isolated incident of a Turkish flag being trampled and another burned at these events. (MFA issued a statement condemning the flag desecration, but was careful not to ascribe any GOAM responsibility for the demonstrators' acts.) To date, the political opposition and nationalist media have not yet protested loudly these latest GOT openings toward Armenia.
END COMMENT

14. (U) LETTER FROM TURKISH PM ERDOGAN TO NEWLY-APPOINTED ARMENIAN PM SARKISSIAN (APRIL 22, 2008) (AS TRANSLATED)

BEGIN TEXT.

Mr. Prime Minister,

I present congratulations to Your Excellency on behalf of my people and myself on the occasion of your assignment as Prime Minister of Armenia.

During the term of your duty, I hope that our bilateral relations will rise to the level of contributing to comfort, peace, stability and prosperity of the region.

As being two neighborly countries that share the same geography, finding lasting solutions to our existing problems through dialogue and establishing good neighborly relations is among our priorities. In the new period which had started with the Presidential elections in Armenia on February 19, 2008, I believe that we can take concrete steps in the normalization of our bilateral relations with the contributions of Your Excellency. In this process, I would like to remind with this thought in mind that our proposals

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that we had conveyed earlier and that we believe would make achievement of progress in this process easier, are still on the agenda.

On this occasion, I extend my heartfelt wishes of health and happiness for the Armenian people as well as their comfort and prosperity.

END TEXT.

15. (U) LETTER FROM TURKISH FM BABACAN TO NEWLY-APPOINTED ARMENIAN PM NALBANDIAN (APRIL 21, 2008) (AS RECEIVED)

BEGIN TEXT.

Excellency,

I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

I am confident that your extensive experience in diplomacy will serve as an invaluable asset for the foreign policy of your country.

As before, we in Turkey stand ready to work towards the normalization of relations between our two nations. It is my sincere hope that we together will be able to seize the opportunity presented by the new political setting to start a meaningful and result-oriented dialogue towards achieving this shared goal.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend to Your Excellency the assurances of my highest consideration.

END TEXT.

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